

Francesco Corbetta - The Best of All

Introduction



In the introduction to his **Instruccion de musica** printed in 1674 Gaspar Sanz refers to Corbetta as “el mejor de todo” – “the best of all” and clearly his contemporaries regarded him as such. Although his music is less popular today than that of Sanz or Santiago de Murcia he is undoubtedly the most significant and prolific composer for the 5-course baroque guitar of the seventeenth century. Five printed books of his music survive today -

1639 De gli scherzi armonici. Bologna : Giacomo Monti & Carlo Zennero, 1639.

1643 Varii capricii per la ghittara spagnuola. Milan : No imprint, 1643.

1648 Varii scherzi di sonate. Brussels : No imprint, 1648.

[1648] No title page. No imprint. “Pirated” edition of Varii scherzi di sonate.

1671 La guitarre royale. Paris : Hierosme Bonneüil, 1671.

1674 La guitarre royale. Paris : Hierosme Bonneüil, 1674.

At least three, possibly four other books may have appeared in print but are now lost.

- 1643/48? Published in Italy or Spain
- 165? Book of Italian tablature. Dedicated to Duke of Brunswick-Luneberg. This includes some pieces by Granata which Corbetta pirated in order to get his revenge on Granata who had earlier included some of Corbetta's pieces in one of his books.
- 165? Book of tablature published in Paris and dedicated to the King Louis XIV. The plates were stolen, reprinted with some other pieces and dedicated to a "foreign prince" ..
- 167? Easie Lessons on the Guittar for young practitioners...By seignior Francisco. Printed in London by John Carr in the 1670s.

An almost unquantifiable amount of music is also attributed to him in contemporary and later manuscript sources. The most significant of these are **GB:Ob Ms.Mus.Sch.C94 - Pieces de Guitarre de differendes Autheures recueillis Par Henry François de Gallot**, copied in the 1660s and **B:Lc.Ms.245** copied by the Flemish clergyman and amateur guitarist, Jean-Baptiste de Castillion in about 1706.

The only full length study of Corbetta is Richard Pinnell's doctoral dissertation **The role of Francesco Corbetta (1615-1681) in the history of music for the baroque guitar** completed in 1976 and subsequently published by UMI Research Press ca. 1980 with the title **Francesco Corbetta and the baroque guitar with a transcription of his works**. This covers a lot ground in a general way but is now very out of date.

This study is an attempt to give a more focused account of Corbetta's life and work. The main part of it comprises English translations of the introductions to his books with detailed commentaries on the wealth of information which these include. It also includes a study of his unusual musical language and of music attributed to him in contemporary manuscript sources.

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Biography

Early years

Unlike most composers of music for the five-course guitar, Corbetta's life story is quite well documented. He was born in Pavia in about 1615. The legend in the border surrounding the engraved portrait of him on page 3 of his second collection of guitar music, 'Varii capricii per la ghittara spagnuola' printed in 1643, reads:

*FRANCESCO CORBETTA PAVESE
ACADEM.CO TRA GL'ERRANTI DI BRESCIA IL CAPRICCIOSO
Di Etta d'Anni 28.
[Academician amongst the Wanderers of Brescia
known as "Il Capriccioso" - at the age of 28.]*

His name also appears as Francesco Corbetta Pavese on the title pages of his 1639 and 1648 books and his obituary states that he was born in Pavia.¹ Pavia lies some twenty miles south of Milan and would have been under Spanish rule at the time when Corbetta was born. Sanseverino and Colonna both published their guitar books in Milan in the 1620s and Sfondrino also published a guitar book there in 1637. The music in these three books is in *alfabeto* and intended to be strummed.

According to his obituary Corbetta was so attached to the guitar that his parents, who had intended him for a different profession, were unable to dissuade him from studying it. From what Corbetta himself says in the Italian preface to 'La guitarre royale' (1671), it seems that he played only the guitar and may have been largely self taught.

It is so obvious that the world already knows it, that I have never played this instrument [i.e. the lute], of which I do not know a single chord, and that my passion has always been for the guitar, which I play for my own pleasure. I have always had a natural talent and have never needed any help to perfect my technique.²

Unlike many of his contemporaries who published music for guitar although they were employed professionally as theorbo players, it seems that he never held a formal musical appointment.

Corbetta's first two collections of guitar music were printed in Italy, 'De gli scherzi armonici' in Bologna in 1639 and 'Varii capricii per la ghittara spagnuola' in Milan in 1643. He taught the guitar for a while in Bologna where Giovanni Battista Granata was one of his students. He mentions Granata by name in the Italian preface to 'La guitarre royale' (1671) and accuses him of plagiarism. 'De gli scherzi armonici' was printed by the well-known printers of tablature, Giacomo Monti and Carlo Zenero. In 1646 Giacomo Monte printed another guitar book in 1646 – 'Intavolatura di chitarra, e chitarriglia' - which is usually attributed today to Carlo Calvi, who has written the dedication at the beginning of the book. This includes part of the preface from Corbetta's 1639 book and abbreviated versions of thirty-four of his pieces in

¹ Mercure (1681).

² La guitarre royale (1671) p.4. ...gia il mondo sa che non ho'mai praticato tal instrumento doue non ne so pur un accordo, che per piacer a me stesso la Chitarra sola n'e statta sempre il mio genio non hauendo mai hautto bisogno d'agiuto per perfetionarla;

alfabeto. The fact that it is not an original book is acknowledged on the title page which states that the music has been taken from *duo eccellenti professori* – one of whom is Corbetta.

‘De gli scherzi armonici’ is dedicated to Count Odoardo Pepoli (1612-80). The Pepoli family came to prominence in Bologna in the fourteenth century. In the fifteenth century they established an alliance with the ruling family in the town, the Bentivoglio, and held positions of trust in their administration. Count Odoardo Pepoli was granted the title of senator in 1653. Two pieces in ‘De gli scherzi armonici’, the *Corrente detta l’Odoarda* (p.60) and *Sarabanda detta la Pepoli* (p.61) are dedicated specifically to him spelling out his name in *alfabeto*. A third piece, a *corrente* (p.62) is dedicated to Count Odoardo’s brother, Oguzone or Uguccione Pepoli (d. 1670). Most the other pieces from page 60 onwards have individual dedications. Amongst these, on page 74, is a piece with the title *La mia donna importuna* dedicated to ‘Al Molt’Illust. Sig. il. Sig. Gioseffo Corbetta. This may be a relative of the composer.

Mantua

Corbetta’s second guitar book, ‘Varii capricii per la ghittara spagnuola’ has no imprint but the dedication to Carlo II, Duke of Mantua and Monferrato is dated Milan, 30th October, 1643, the occasion of the Duke’s fourteenth birthday. The extinction of the male line of the senior branch of the Gonzaga family, descendants of Vincenzo I, lead to war (1626-31) between France, which supported the claim of Carlo, Duke of Nevers (1580-1637), the grandson of Federico I, Duke of Mantua, and Spain, who supported Cesare Gonzaga, Duke of Guastalla, grandson of Federico’s brother. The peace of Cherasco (1631) granted the Duchy to Carlo. On his death in 1637 the Duchy passed to his grandson Carlo II (30 October 1629 – 14 August 1665) who ruled from 1637- 1665.³

Slightly earlier on 31st May 1643 Corbetta had been admitted as a member of the Accademia degli Erranti in Brescia. Brescia lies some thirty miles north-east of Milan and had been ruled by the Republic of Venice since 1421. The Accademia was founded in 1620 by the fathers Lattanzio and Silvio Stella, both religious of the Cassinense Order. It was inaugurated in 1626 at the monastery of the Padri Cassinensi and Biagio Marini was appointed its music director.⁴ Members of this particular *accademia* had to be conversant not only with music, painting and dance but also fencing and riding. On the right-hand side of the engraved portrait of Corbetta on p.3 is a coat of arms depicting the moon shining upon a well surrounded by the motto

SEMBRA CAPRICIO MA NE TRAGO IL VERO
It may seem capricious but it gets to the heart of the matter
[literally “bears the truth”].

Corbetta was attached to the court in Mantua over a number of years but he seems to have enjoyed frequent leaves of absence in order to pursue a career as a freelance musician, touring the courts of Europe. On December 10th 1644 he was granted an *attestatione* to travel freely in Italy and abroad by Duke Carlo II’s mother, Maria Gonzaga (1609-60) who served as regent from 1637-47.

Francesco Corbetta Pavese has become so worthy of our gratitude by his virtue, and good character, that we think it reasonable to give him some sign of our great good will and approval, signed and sealed by us, with the endorsement of those present; we therefore hope and request that the above

³ Kamen (2000) p.131-2. Entry for Gonzaga. Sometimes known as Carlo III as his father, Carlo II, died before 1637.

⁴ I-BRas, Archivo antico municipale, Accademi Erranti, b.142, mazzo 13, f. 18v. [Fontijn (2006) p.22, n.34].

named Corbetta, currently in the service of the Duke, our son, will be recognized, esteemed, and accepted by everyone with all the honors, graces, and prerogatives which are enjoyed by the other servants of our court, and of the Duke our son. We also attest, that it will be necessary for the same (Corbetta) to travel throughout Italy, and beyond.⁵

Although there are references to his trips abroad in several sources it is not possible to date these with any certainty as he seems to have travelled back and forth from Italy on a regular basis between 1644-1654. According to his obituary

“... first he astonished all the musicians of Italy. Next, he went to Spain where he was heard at the Court playing such things as before him had been believed impossible on the guitar.⁶

At the time the idea of using the guitar for anything other than strummed music may have been a novelty in Spain. As far as we know the only guitar book printed there in the first half of the seventeenth century was Amat's 'Guitarra española' which explains how to play the twelve major and minor common chords and how to use them to accompany vocal music. The Spanish king, Philip IV (1605-65) who acceded to the throne in 1621 was also Duke of Milan which may account for Corbetta's visit. He himself mentions visiting Spain in the Italian preface to 'La guitarre royale' (1671) when giving an account of his grievance against Granata.

I must speak of someone else in Italy, in Bologna, a certain guitar player named Granata, who, besides stealing my sonatas, also took ideas from my printed books and published them under his name, as I saw in one of his books in Venice, on my return from Spain.⁷

The book which he refers to is probably Granata's 'Capricci armonici sopra la chittarriglia spagnuola' printed by Giacomo Monti in Bologna in 1646. If this were the case, Corbetta's trip to Spain probably took place between 1645–1647. Corbetta seems to have been a regular visitor to Venice. The obituary goes on to say that

From there [Spain] he passed to the Emperor and all the Courts of Germany where he was made welcome by the greatest Princes. Having returned to Italy to defend the glory that certain envious people wished to tarnish, by claiming his work as their own, (another possible reference to his dispute with Granata) he attached himself to the Duke of Mantua who was pleased indeed to have such a man to present to his Majesty (Louis XIV of France).⁸

⁵ I-Mas, Libro dei Mandati 52 (1644, gennaio-1650, dicembre). [Fontijn (2006) p.22, n.33].

Attestatione per il Corbetta, dicembre 10, 1644: S'è reso così degno della gratia nostra Francesco Corbetta Pavese per la sua virtù, e buoni condizioni, che habbiamo creduto ragionevole dargli qualche segno dell'ottima volontà, e dispositione nostra, e però in virtù delli presenti, che saranno da noi fermate, et col nostro sigillo corroborate dichiariamo il sodetto Corbetta actual servitore del Duca nostro figlio, e vogliamo, che da ciascheduno sia riconosciuto, stimato, et ammesso per tale con tutti gli honori, gratie, e prerogative, che godono gli altri attuali servitori della nostra corte, et del duca nostro figlio. Attestando in oltre, che occorrendo al medemo trasferirsi in qualsivoglia luogo, così nell'Italia, come fuori.

⁶ Mercure (1681). ...il surprit d'abord tous les Musiciens d'Italie. En suite il alla en Espagne, où il fit entendre à la Cour, des choses que l'on avoit crû auparavant impossibles sur la Guitarre.

⁷ La guitarre royale (1671) p.4. Diro dun altro in Italia à bologna qual è un certo Granatta sonator di Chitarra del quale oltre l'hauer rubato sonate, ne hà distacato anche inuentioni da miei libri stampati, et messe su suoi, come io vidi in un suo à Venetia al mio ritorno di Spagna.

⁸ Mercure (1681). De là il passa chez l'Empereur, & par toutes les Cours d'Allemagne, où il fue chéry des plus grands Princes. Après estre retourné en Italie, pour soutenir sa gloire que des Envieux vouloient obscurcir, en s'attribuant injustement ses Ouvrages, il se donna au Duc de Mantoüe, qui fut bien aise d'avoir un tel Homme à présenter à sa Majesté.

Corbetta's travels in Northern European took place in the aftermath of the long running conflict known as the Thirty Years War which was fought primarily in Central Europe between 1618 and 1648, although the whole of Europe was involved in one way or another at different times. It was precipitated by the election of the new Holy Roman Emperor, Ferdinand II, a devout catholic, who tried to impose religious uniformity throughout his domains. The northern protestant states, which had been granted religious freedom in the Peace of Augsburg, formed the Protestant Union to protect their rights. In 1619 the kingdom of Bohemia, which was an elected monarchy, chose the Calvinist, Frederick V, Elector of the Rhenish Palatinate, as their new king and he and his wife, Elizabeth, daughter of the English king James I, took up residence in Prague. Their reign was however short lived, no more that a few months during the winter of 1619–1620, which earned them the sobriquet of the Winter King and Queen. After defeat by forces of the empire at the battle of the White Mountain, they were forced to flee and were offered assylum in the Dutch Republic. Frederick was stripped of his title and territories as Elector Paletine; these were eventually restored to his eldest surviving son, Karl Ludwig, in 1648. Their numerous children, their spouses and offspring crop up regularly in Corbetta's biography. Indeed, most of Corbetta's royal patrons were related to one another in one way or another which explains why he travelled so widely.

In January 1648 Corbetta was in Brussels, where he dedicated his third surviving book, 'Varii scherzi di sonate' to the Archduke Leopold Wilhelm of Austria, son of Emperor Ferdinand II and Mariana of Bavaria. In 1646 Philip IV nominated the Archduke governor of the Spanish Netherlands, a position which he held until 1656. As the book is described as "Libro quarto" on title page. Corbetta must have had another book printed between 1643-1648. No copies of such a book have come to light to date. Corbetta continued to visit the Court in Brussels at least until the end of 1652. The record of the expenses of the Archduke between May 1647 and December 1652 includes an entry dated 18th December 1652 of a payment to "Juan" Francesco Corbetta of a gratuity of 240 florins "for having played some times in my apartment".⁹

Leopold Wilhelm served as a general in the Franco-Spanish Wars (1635-1659), a continuation of the Thirty Years War. In August 1648, after the signing of the Treaty of Westphalia, the forces of the Spanish-Netherlands under his command were defeated at the battle of Lens. Later in the war, he was involved in military action outside of the Netherlands, in the course of which several northern French forts were seized in February–March 1652. It seems that during this conflict Leopold contracted malaria and the physician attending him recommended music as part of his treatment. The composer and keyboard player, Froberger, was also employed for the same purpose.

Corbetta also seems to have been in Vienna sometime between November 13th 1648 and the end of July 1649. An entry in the Court Payments for that period reads

Johann (sic) Francisco Corbetta, Musician, for playing the guitar to both Royal Persons, was presented with a reward of 60 fl.¹⁰

The "Royal Persons" in question were presumably the Emperor, Ferdinand III and his second wife, Archduchess Maria Leopoldine whom he had married on 2nd July 1648. The references to Corbetta as

⁹ ArchiveBrussels – Archives Générales du Royaume – Manuscrits divers – Dépenses de l'archiduc Guillaume, no. 1374, p. 232v lists expenses between 11th May 1647 and 31st December 1652. [Thieffry (2002) p. 159-173]. B-Bar, Manuscrits divers 1374 (Phillips MS 7083), fol 232v. [Thieffry (2002)].

¹⁰ Netti (1929). Eintrag in den Hofzahlamtsrechnungen für den Zeitraum 13 November (1648) bis Ende July 1649 - Johann (sic) Francisco Corbetta Musico umbwillen er vor beeden Khönigli Persohnen auf der Kittara gespielt zur Verehrung dargeraicht 60 fl.

Juan or Johann in these two sources are unusual; no other source suggests he had more than one Christian name.

Corbetta did not find working for the Duke of Mantua congenial. Eventually, in a letter dated from Venice, 12th March 1652, he asked to be relieved of his post because he was so poorly paid.

Captain Luca, on the order of Your Serene Highness, has written to ask me to return to your service and I offer humble thanks to Your Most Serene Highness for the honour. But because of my previous meagre earnings it has been necessary for me to attach myself to the Prince of Lüneberg, from whom I have received many favours, both here and in Paris. I beg your Highness therefore to excuse me for I have tried many times to work for Your Most Serene Highness with little success.¹¹

The Prince of Lüneberg referred to is presumably Georg Wilhelm, Duke of Zell (1624- 1705), the second of four brothers¹² who, following a family dispute, divided the rulership of the Duchy of Brunswick and Lüneberg between them. The third brother, Johann Friedrich, also known as the Duke of Brunswick Lüneberg, married Bénédicte Henriette, a daughter of Duke Carlo's sister, Anna de Gonzaga.¹³ The youngest, Ernst August, ruled over the Principality of Calenburg, a sub division of the Duchy with Hanover as its capital. In the 1650s the brothers were in the habit of paying annual visits to Venice during Carnival, the season preceding Lent. Maria Mancini, a niece of Cardinal Mazarin, refers in her memoirs to having spent time in the company of the Duke of Brunswick Lüneberg and the Duke of Mantua in the city during Carnival. Corbetta may have come to the prince's attention in Venice or during visits to Paris.

The Hanover court registers list a payment to Corbetta of 160 Thalern for the year 1652-53.¹⁴ In the preface to 'La guitarre royale' (1671) Corbetta says that he had dedicated a book to Georg Wilhelm but no copies of this have so far come to light.¹⁵

Georg Wilhelm had been betrothed to Sophie (1630-1714), the youngest daughter of the Winter Queen. In 1650 Sophie took up residence in Heidelberg with her eldest surviving brother, Karl Ludwig, after his restoration as Elector Palatine. However, Georg Wilhelm was reluctant to marry¹⁶ and therefore arranged for her to marry his younger brother, Ernst August instead. The two young men visited Sophie in Heidelberg in the spring of 1653 and Sophie commented on their visit in her memoirs.

Just then Duke Ernst August of Brunswick Lüneberg passed through Heidelberg on his return from Venice. I had seen him as quite a youth in Holland.¹⁷ ***Since then his appearance had greatly improved, and he was universally admired, but as the youngest of three brothers he was not thought***

¹¹ I-MAa, Archivio Gonzaga, Carteggi esteri, Carteggi ad inviati (Venezia) Busta 1571 Diversi 1652. [Fontijn (2006) p. 23/281]. Il Sig[no]r Cap[itano] Luca, d'ordine di V[ostra] A[ltezza] Ser[enissima] mi scrisse di ritornar al servito, et io rendo humiliss[im]e gratie à V[ostra] A[ltezza] Ser[enissima] del honore, ma essendo statto nesescitato dalla precedente mia poco fortuna ad impegnarmi con il Sig[no]r prensipe de luneberg, dal quale hò ricevuto molte gratie tanto à pariggi come qui, suplico V[ostra] A[ltezza] stante haver tentato molte volte con poco sorte mia il servitio di V[ostra] A[ltezza] Ser[enissima] ad havermi per iscusato...

¹² The eldest brother, Christian Louis, who died in 1665, does not seem to have had been involved with Corbetta.

¹³ She was married to Edward, the fourth son of the Elector Palatine and was commonly known as the Princess Palatine. She may be the dedicatee of Carré's 'Livre de guitarre' (1671).

¹⁴ Sievers (1961) p.46/134. [Pinnell (1980) p.176 Note 50].

¹⁵ La guitarre royale (1671) p.4.

¹⁶ Georg Wilhelm subsequently contracted a morganatic marriage with a French woman, Eleanor d'Olbreuse and their daughter, Sophie Dorothea married Sophie's eldest son, George Louis who succeeded to the English throne as King George I in 1714.

¹⁷ Sophie spent her childhood at her mother's court in the Hague.

a desirable prospect. We played the guitar together, which served to show off his exquisite hands; in dancing he also excelled. He offered to send me some of Corbetti's guitar music and began a correspondence on this subject which I was the first to break off, fearing that the world might call my friendship for him by a tenderer name.¹⁸

In spite of her initial reservations, the couple were eventually married in 1658. In 1692, when it became apparent that none of his older brothers would leave male heirs, Ernst August was created Prince-Elector of Brunswick-Lüneberg, colloquially known as Elector of Hanover and Sophie from that time forward was known as Electress Sophie of Hanover. It would be interesting to know what the couple played together and what music by Corbetta Ernst August sent her. At that point in time Corbetta had not (as far as we know) composed any music for two guitars to play together. Sophie seems to have been quite a talented musician. She also mentions that whilst she was recovering from the birth of her eldest son, George Louis, she performed vocal trios with Ernst August and Johann Friedrich accompanying herself on the guitar.¹⁹

Corbetta is mentioned in two letters written in 1654 to the Duke of Mantua by Antonio Bosso, the “residente” or Mantuan envoy in Venice. These relate to negotiations over the possible employment of the singer, Antonia Padoani Bembo, at the Mantuan Court. The first letter, dated 14th July, mentions that Corbetta is about to leave for Germany by way Mantua and that the Duke will hear from him about the “father of the girl who sings.”

Before leaving for Germany, Signore Francesco Corbetta will come to the feet of Your Most Serene Highness to greet you humbly. Your Highness will hear from him certain details on the subject of the father of the girl who sings.²⁰

A second letter dated July 21st refers to the fact that Antonia’s father has given her in marriage to Corbetta.

Signore Francesco Corbetta is returning to the feet of Your Most Serene Highness. You will hear from his own lips about his dealings in the matter of the girl who sings of what interest I have not been able to understand because I have been completely tricked by him [it is not clear whether this is Corbetta or Bembo's father] behind my back; so that neither Bartolo nor Baldo can come close to explaining their strategies.

But at present all that this means for Your Highness is that they are a cage of madmen whose interests have only pernicious goals. Furthermore, I call to the attention of Your Highness the fact that as well as the doctor falling into a frenzy (although a commoner expression would be to say that he is possessed by the devil), the girl who sings suffers from fainting fits brought on by frenetic fears of her father, who has handed her over in marriage to Signore Corbetta and it is confirmed in a private letter as a greater sign that they remain attached to one another.²¹

¹⁸ Sophia (1888) p. 46-47.

¹⁹ KROLL (1975) p.101.

²⁰ I-Maa, Archivio Gonzaga, Carteggi esteri, Carteggi ad inviati (Venezia) Busta 1571, Bosso Residente 1654. [Fontijn (2006) p.21/280]. Viene a piedi dell’A[ltezza] V[ostra] Ser[enissi]mo avanti partire per Alemagna il Sig[no]re Fran[ces]co Corbetta p[er] humilmente riverirla. Dal med[esi]mo V[ostra]A[ltezza] udirà certo particolare in materia del Padre della figlia che canta.

²¹ I-MAa, Archivio Gonzaga, Carteggi esteri, Carteggi ad inviati (Venezia) Busta 1571 Bosso Residente 1654. [Fontijn (2006) p. 21/280. Ritorna à piedi dell’A[ltezza] V[ostra] Ser[enissi]ma il Sig[no]re Francesco Corbetta dal quale udirà con la viva voce l’operato da lui in materia della figlia che canta, nel qual interesse non ho io potuto sbracciarmi p[er] esser raggiro adossato tutto à lui, che ne Bartolo, ne Baldo può in ristretto capire gli strattagemmi di costoro.

Altro p[er] hora, significo riverentem[en]te all’A[ltezza] V[ostra] solo che tutti costoro sono una Gabia de Pazzi i quali con suoi fini interessati procurano fini perniciosi. Di più porto alla notitia di V[ostra]A[ltezza] che oltre l’esser il medico caduto in fernesia

A postscript to same letter dated July 22nd also refers to the marriage

After having written the enclosed letter – which was to be consigned to Signore Francesco Corbetta - although he did not wish to pick it up as he was about to miss the hour of his departure – I thought it better to keep it and to send it to your Highness by the shortest possible route to Verona, with the ordinary Saturday courier, so that Your Highness will be advised about the capricious matrimony of the said Corbetta.²²

Although Corbetta was obviously an acquaintance of the family, it seems that the marriage to Antonia did not actually take place as in 1659 she married the Venetian nobleman, Lorenzo Bembo. However, in 1654 at the advanced age of 39 Corbetta was evidently unmarried although he may have been a widower. There has been much speculation as to whether he remained in contact with Antonia after her marriage to Bembo had broken down and she left Venice sometime after the winter of 1676-77 to settle in Paris. However, there is no evidence to suggest that he helped her to escape from Italy or that he assisted her in any way in later life. Corbetta's obituary states that Charles II procured a wife for him, presumably some time after 1660.²³ He also had a daughter referred to by Adam Ebert (aka Apulius Apronius)²⁴ but it is not known when and where she was born or who her mother was.

Paris

According to the obituary, at some point the Duke of Mantua introduced Corbetta to the French king, Louis XIV. Although Corbetta may have visited Paris earlier, he probably did not settle there before 1654. During the civil war known as the "Fronde", which was waged in France between 1650–1653, Italian musicians were expelled from Paris. It has frequently been claimed that Corbetta was guitar teacher to Louis XIV but this is not supported by any documentary evidence. Médard's obituary states only that

...he attached himself to the Duke of Mantua, who was pleased indeed to have such a man to present to his Majesty; Our Great Monarch honoured him with such esteem and liberality and employed him in the most pompous spectacles. But his nature not allowing him to stay in one place for long, he wished to go to England...²⁵

The post of guitar teacher to the king was in fact held by Bernard Jourdan de la Salle, a native of Sanlucar de Barrameda in the province of Cadiz, Spain, from April 1650 until his death in 1695 when he was succeeded by his son, Louis. There are records of payments to him between 1684-1693.²⁶ The relevant entry in the official accounts reads as follows -

(bench[e] la voce piu trita, è ch'il Demonio sia di lui in possessato) e la figlia parim[en]te che canta patisse il mal caduco, riportato dalli spaventi frenetici del Padre, il quale hà concesso in matrimonio la de[et]ta figlia al Sig[no]re Corbetta, e con scrittura privata si è sottoscritto restandome al maggior segno invaghito.

²²I-MAa, Archivio Gonzaga, Carteggi esteri, Carteggi ad inviati (Venezia) Busta 1571 Bosso Residente 1654. [Fontijn (2006) p.24/281]. Doppo scritto la qui inserta p[er] consegnarla in mano del Sig[no]re Fran[ces]co Corbetta, il quale non s'è compiaciuto levarla rumpendo l' hora della partenza et io ho stimato accertato inviarla all' A[ltezza] V[ostra] Ser[enissi]ma p[er] la via di Verona ch'è la piu breve del corr[ier]o ord[ina]rio de sabato acciò in qualche parte V[ostra] A[ltezza] resti avisata del capricioso matrimonio del d[et]to Corbetta e di nuovo profundam[en]te m'inchino.

²³ Mercure (1681).

²⁴ Ebert (1724) Under Theil – Reise nach Italien.p.11.

²⁵ Mercure (1681) ...il se donna au Duc de Mantoüe, qui fut bien aise d'avoir un tel Homme à présenter à sa Majesté ; Nostre Grand Monarque l'honora de son estime, & de ses libéralitez, & l'employa dans les plus pompeux spéctacles; mais son nature! ne permettant pas qu'il fust longtemps dans un mesme lieu, il voulust aller en Angleterre...

²⁶ Benoit (1971a) ps.79, 93, 105,112,120,130, 137.

Retention [of the post of] of the King's guitarist for the Sieur de la Salle. Having regard to the services that the late Bernard Jourdan de la Salle has given us since the year 1650 when we chose him to teach us to play the guitar, it is our wish for this reason, to preserve the said charge for Louis Jourdan de la Salle, his son, and that he should keep the ordinary wages of 1200 livres tournaments which are attributable to him.²⁷

Bernard Jourdan de la Salle's association with the French Court was clearly of long-standing. He was granted French nationality in 1681²⁸ and Louis XIV was godfather to his son.²⁹

In 1715 Jacques Bonnet commented on Louis' proficiency as a guitarist claiming that Mazarin brought a guitar teacher for him from Italy.

I am convinced that it is praise worthy of his Majesty, that it is said that in eighteen months he played as well as his guitar teacher, whom Cardinal Mazarin had invited expressly to come from Italy, to show him how to play this instrument which was widely used in that time.³⁰

However, Bonnet does not name the teacher and may be mistaken in saying that he came from Italy. His information probably originates with his uncle, Pierre Bourdelot (d. 1685), physician to Louis XIII and the Condé family.

In 1780 Jean-Benjamin de La Borde included Corbetta in his alphabetical list of "Musiciens Français" taking his information from Médard's obituary in 'Mercure Galante'. Like Médard, all he has said is that the duke of Mantua introduced Corbetta to Louis; he says nothing about his being employed as his teacher.

CORBET, (Francisque), fameux Jouer de guitarrre, né à Pavie.

His parents threatened him angrily and tried unsuccessfully to compel him to abandon this instrument, which distracted him from all other interests. He was admired in Italy, Spain and Germany, and was loved by several Sovereigns. Eventually the Duke of Mantua presented him Louis XIV; but the taste for travelling having seized him again, he passed into England, where the King married him off, gave him the title of Gentleman of the Queen's Household, a key to his room, his portrait, and a considerable pension. He returned to die in France, loved and regretted by all who had known him. Here is the epitaph made by Mr. Medard, one of his best pupils, and his best friend.³¹

²⁷ Secrétariat de la Maison du Roi" March 14th 1695, f° 38v in the series O.1 39. [BENOIT (1971a) p. 141]. Retenüe de joueur de guitarrre du Roy, pour le Sr de la Salle - Ayant regard aux services que feu Bernard Jourdan de la Salle nous a rendu depuis l'année 1650 que nous le choisimes pour nous enseigner a jouër de la guitarrre, nous avons bien voulu, en cette consideration, conserver lad. charge a Louis Jourdan de la Salle, son fils, et luy contnuer les gages ordinaires de 1200 livres tournois qui y sont attribuez.

²⁸ Benoit (1971a) p. 79 – the entry reads "Naturalité pour Bernard Jourdan dit la Salle, natif de St. Luc en Espagne, faisant profession de la Religion catholique et romaine".

²⁹ Benoit (1992) p. 209.

³⁰ Bonnet (1715) Chapter 10, p.330-31. Je suis persuadé que c'est une louange infiniment au dessous de sa Majesté, comme de dire qu'en dix-huit mois elle égala son Maitre de guitarrre, que le Cardinal de Mazarin avoit fait venir exprès d'Italie, pour lui montrer à jouer de cet Instrument qui étoit fort en usage dans ce tems-là.

³¹ La Borde (1780) Vol. 3, Book 5, Chapter 9, Musiciens Français, p. 503-4. CORBET, (Francisque), fameux Jouer de guitarrre, né à Pavie. Ses Parens le menacerent inutilement de leur colere, pour le forcer à abandonner cet instrument, que lui ôtait tout autre goût. Il se fit admirer en Italie, en Espagne, en Allemagne & fut aimé de plusieurs Souverains. Enfin Duc de Mantoüe les donna à Louis XIV ; mais le goût des voyages l'ayant repris, il passa en Angleterre, où le Roi le maria, lui donna le titre de Gentilhomme de la Chambre de la Reyne, une clef de sa chambre, son portrait & une pension considerable. Il revint mourir en France, aimé & regretté de tous ceux qui l'avaient connu. Voice l'épitaphe que lui fit M. Medard, un de ses meilleurs élèves, & son meilleur ami.

It is clear however that by 1656 Corbetta was in France at the court of Louis XIV. In January-February of that year Jean-Baptiste Lully's ballet 'La galanterie du temps' was performed during Carnival. The music for the ballet has not survived but the libretto states that 'Corbetti. Les deux La Barre, frères et les petites Violons' accompanied a duet sung by Mademoiselle de la Barre and La Signora Anna Bergerotti.³² The ballet opens with an aria for Venus "Venere io son che vò cerando il riso".³³ This is followed by *entrées* and a serenade in Italian in the form of a dialogue which was performed by La Barre and Bergerotti.³⁴ The Italian singer, Anna Bergerotti, arrived in Paris in 1655 as a member of a group of Italian musicians which had previously spent time at the court of Queen Christina of Sweden and which also included the lutenist and guitarist, Angelo Michele Bartolotti. The well-known French singer, Anne Chabanceau de la Barre, with her brothers Joseph and Pierre, had also spent time at the Swedish court. "Les petites Violons" – also known as "La petite bande" was a group of 16 players, (later augmented to 21), subsidiary to the *grand bande* – "24 violons du Roi". Lully was given permission to conduct them some time before 1656 and they appeared for the first time under his direction in 'La galanterie'.³⁵

In both the French and Italian prefaces to 'La guitarre royale' (1671) Corbetta himself also mentions taking part in Lully's ballet and says that he was allowed by the king to compose or arrange an *entrée* for several guitars to be performed during the ballet. He also refers to an incident which took place, apparently in Paris in the same year, when the plates of one of his books were stolen from him and re-used to print another book dedicated to a "foreign prince". In the Italian preface he says that he had presented Louis XIV with two copies of it. In the French preface he says he dedicated the book to the King, and presented two copies of it to him, but does not specify that it was printed in Paris or the year of publication.

The Italian Preface reads as follows:

I would like to tell you – so that it does not happen again – about what happened to some of my sonatas which I had sent for printing; and also, about other books which have been patched up. In particular [I would like to tell you what happened] in 1656 here in Paris, to one I had had printed [at the time] when it pleased His Majesty to allow me to take part in an Entrée for several guitars of a ballet composed by the most famous Sr. Gio. Battista Lulli. As an act of respect, I presented His Majesty with two copies. As I had to travel, the plates were transported elsewhere and after some other pieces had been added to them they were dedicated to a foreign Prince. As this has been noticed here, without however any indication as to the character responsible for this impudence, I felt obliged to give another [book] for printing. I am astonished at these composers who have no shame in putting their names to books which they have not made any efforts themselves to compose.³⁶

The text of the French Preface is as follows:

³² F-Pbn Ms.Rés.F.524b p.75.

³³ I am Venus who makes laughter.

³⁴ Prunières (1910) p.165-6.

³⁵ Anthony (1986) p.3-4.

³⁶ La guitarre royale (1671) p.4. Mi conuiere d'auertirti accio non aplichi certi libri messi in stampa di mie sonate gia nechie poste su miei altri libri stampati et parti di quelle rapezate et in particolare in uno che fecci stampare l'anno 1656 qui in Parigi doue si compiaque sua Maestà di admetermi in una entrata di piu Chitare d'un Balletto composto dal famosissimo S^r Gio Battista Lulli, ondio per un atto d'ossequio ne presentai due esemplari a S. M. et essendomi occorss^o di partire ne furono traportate le stampe altroue che aggiuntoui altre sonate fù dedicato a un Principe Straniero; come qui se' uisto; senza pero'alcuno inditio del perssonaggio che n'hauea pigliato l'ardire ne resto per cio in obligo di darne un altro in breue alle stampe. Mi stupisco di questi autori senza uergogna di far uedere il lor nome sopra libri che non hanno hauto fatica di componerli; ne godo per tanto à sua confusione che la mia Chitarra gl habbia soleuati dalla nescesità.

Amongst these are those who have taken from me the plates of a book which I had left in Paris, after having dedicated it to the King of France, on the occasion of a ballet composed by the most famous composer Jean-Baptiste Lully, Master of the King's Music in 1656. For this I was allowed by His Majesty to make an Entrée for several guitars, having presented two copies of this book of my composition to that great monarch, in recognition of all the favours which I had received from His Majesty. They took advantage of the time of my departure from Paris in order to seize the said plates, throwing in some other pieces and dedicating them afresh in their name to a foreign prince:³⁷

This may be a reference to a pirated edition of his 1648 guitar book which came to light in 1991.³⁸ It seems that during his years in France he also had printed another book which he dedicated to the Duke of Brunswick Lüneberg. It is in connection with this book that he refers to his dispute with Granata. Because Granata had previously taken the liberty of including some of Corbetta's pieces in one of his books, Corbetta seized the opportunity to get his own back by including some of Granata's pieces in one of his book.

I must speak of someone else in Italy, in Bologna, a certain guitar player named Granata, who, besides stealing my sonatas, also took ideas from my printed books and published them under his name, as I saw in one of his books in Venice, on my return from Spain. Whilst I was attending to some business in Bologna, Granata came to me, and apologised for publishing some of my sonatas in his book. As he had been one of my students, he had taken the liberty of doing so. It is also true to say that I had given him many of my sonatas years ago, but as he offended me several times with his arrogant malice, I resolved to treat him in the same way in a book dedicated to the honourable Georg Wilhelm, Duke of Brunswick Lüneberg. Because this obscure reprimand was evidently unclear to him, I was forced to make a more explicit clarification during my stay in England following a discourse in one of his books in which he accused me of plagiarizing authors of both guitar music and lute music. This was clearly the awkward stupidity of a senseless person in view of the fact that he himself had stolen and published some of my sonatas and other pieces, and moreover that he had requested his friends here to send him lute sonatas by Gaultier, Dufaut and others.³⁹

No copies of a book dedicated to the Duke of Brunswick Lüneberg have come to light so far but it is possible that music attributed to Corbetta in a much later manuscript source, B-LcMs.245, copied by the Flemish clergyman and amateur guitarist, Jean-Baptiste de Castillon in about 1706, is from this source.

³⁷ La guitare royale (1671) p.8. ...parmi lesquels il y en a qui m'ont enlevé les planches d'un livre que j'avois laissé à Paris, apres l'avoir dedié au Roy de France, à l'occasion d'un Balet, composé par le tres-fameux Auteur, Jean-Baptiste Lulli, Maistre de la Musique du Roy en 1656: où je fus admis par sa Majesté a faire une Entrée de plusieurs guitarres, ayant présenté deux exemplaires de ce Livre de ma compositon à ce grand Monarque, en reconnoissance de toutes les faveurs que j'avois receu de sa Majesté. Ils prirent le temps de mon despart de Paris pour surprendre les dites planches, d'y adioster quelqu'autres pieces, et de le dedie de nouveau sous leur nom à un Prince estranger.

³⁸ A facsimile of this print with an introduction by Monica Hall and Lex Eisenhardt was published by Deutsche LautenGesellschaft in 2006.

³⁹ La guitare royale (1671) p. 4. Diro d'un altro in Italia à Bologna qual è un certo Granatta Sonator di Chitarra del qualle oltre l'hauer rubato sonate, ne hà distacato anche inuentioni da miei libri stampati, et messe su suoi, come io uidi in un suo à Venetia al mio ritorno di Spagna, et ne fui per qualche mio affare à Bologna quall mi uenne il detto Granatta a scusarssi d'haver messo alcune mie sonate sul suo libro, che per esser statto mio scolare ne haueua presa la libertà uero é che gli die di molte mie sonate gia'anni sono, ma'hauendomi più uolte offeso, causa la malitia superba che ne tiene, rissolsi di tratarlo da simia in un libro dedicato al Serenissimo Georgio-Guglielmo Duca di Bronsuich è Lunebergh che ne contentandossi della riprensione occulta, m'hà forzato di farne una piu chiara, per un discorso posto in un suo libro nel mio soggiorno in Inghilterra aducendo una confusione d'Autori tanto di Chitarra come di liuto contro me; Goffa balordagine d'un insensato, sapendo che è lui medesimo, d'hauer stirachiato sonate mie, et altri su suoi libri et piu dato ordine qui a suoi amici dinuiorli sonate di liuto di questi maestri Gottier, et du fo' et altri;

This manuscript includes fifty pieces not found in any of his surviving printed books. In addition, there are a further twenty pieces which Castillon has attributed to Corbetta which also appear in Granata's 'Novi capricci armonici musical' (1674). These may be the pieces which Corbetta pirated.⁴⁰ **Checking**

England

Early years at Court

At some point during the 1650s Corbetta came to the attention of members of the English royal family and in particular the king, Charles II, in exile since 1645 following the defeat of the royalists in the English Civil War. Although Charles was initially resident in France, from July 1654 he led a nomadic existence, living from hand to mouth mainly in the Low Countries, until the Restoration of the Monarchy in 1660. Corbetta seems to have followed Charles first to the Netherlands and thence to England. The Dutch scholar, Constantijn Huygens, refers to him in a letter which he wrote to Lady Swanne dated 7th May, 1660.⁴¹

I hope you will have your ears feasted at Breda with the excellent guitar of Sig.or⁴² Corbetta, which indeed is worthy of your hearing and admiration, as I can testify by the favour of her Royal Highness.

Utricia Ogle, Lady Swanne, the Dutch singer, was the wife of Sir Wolfgang William de Swan, a diplomat employed by Charles whilst in exile.⁴³ "Her Royal Highness" refers to Princess Mary, daughter of Charles I and sister of Charles II married to William II, Prince of Orange. She was part of her brother's entourage when he moved his court from Breda to the Hague in anticipation of his return to England early in May.⁴⁴ On 23rd May Charles finally set sail from the Netherlands to reclaim his throne. He arrived at Dover two days later and proceeded to London via Canterbury and Rochester where he spent the night. Whether or not Corbetta was in his entourage at this time, or whether he arrived in England later, his subsequent career at the Court in London during the 1660s and 1670s is well documented both in Official State Papers and private letters and journals. However, he continued to make regular visits to Paris and further a field during the last twenty years of his life.

The earliest references to Corbetta at this time are in connection with the controversy over the patenting of various "lotteries" - actually games of chance which the player had little chance of winning. The first of these was known as "L'oca di Catalonia". Most of the information about this dispute is found in the papers accumulated by the Secretaries of State in their domestic capacity throughout the reign of Charles II. These consist of letters and petitions of one kind or another. They are "calendared" - that is to say listed in chronological order - in the 'Calendar of State Papers' which was published in 1860s. In most cases this reproduces the relevant text although this is sometimes abridged. They are translated into English if this is not the language of the original. Unfortunately, not all the documents are dated so

⁴⁰ Hall (2005).

⁴¹ Huygens (1916). Part. 5, Letter 5647, p. 335-6.

⁴² In the 1916 Worp edition of Huygens' letters Corbetta's title was mistakenly transcribed as *sig.^{ita}*. The original letter is in the Koninklijke Bibliotheek in Den Haag and clearly reads *sig.or*. I am indebted to Lex Eisenhardt for this information. Writing from Antwerp on April 20, 1659 Huygens refers to a different "Francisque" - *De onvergetelijke Francisque laat ons buitengewone dingen hooren en speelt van dag tot dag beter* (The unforgettable Francisque lets us hear extraordinary things and plays better from day to day). Part 5, p.:318. This is not however Corbetta, but the singer, Francisca Duarte, known as the "French nightingale". Worp may have confused the two.

⁴³ Fraser (1997) p.82.

⁴⁴ Fraser (1997) p.174.

that the precise sequence of events is difficult to determine. Other less reliable accounts of the controversy are found in some other sources.

Corbetta's name appears for the first time in a petition to the King in January, 1661.

Petition of Francisco Corbett to the King, for an order for a patent, prohibiting any other person from setting up the game of "L'Acca di Catalonia", the privilege of which His Majesty is pleased to grant him.⁴⁵

The petition was granted on February 22nd 1661.

On November 14th in the same year he petitioned for a prohibition for anyone else to exercise a similar game without his consent.

Petition of Francesco Corbet to the King. Notwithstanding his sole warrant for practicing the game L'Oca di Catalonia, Gio, Franc. Finochelli, formerly practicing the same by his consent, but dismissed for his scandalous life, made a society with Jas. Roche and his cousin, for a newly invented lottery called the royal Oak, and got leave from Sir Edw. Ford to practice it though it is only the same game disguised and the name changed; begs a prohibition for any to exercise a game approaching his, without his consent.⁴⁶

On November 23rd an order was issued forbidding Francisco Finochelli from exercising the same lottery and James Roche petitioned not to be prevented from exercising a new, presumably different, lottery.

Order forbidding a lottery carried out by Francisco Finochelli, as being the same with the L'Oca de Catalonia, for which the sole license was granted to Francesco Corbet.⁴⁷

Petition of James Roche and his Associates to the King not to prevent them from exercising a new lottery etc....⁴⁸

On August 25th 1663 Corbetta and James Roche were granted licenses for further games of chance referred to as "The Royale Oake and Queenes Nosegay"

License to Capt. James Roche, Adjutant of our Gard and Francis Corbett Gent to set up and exercise the lotteries of the Royale Oake and Queenes Nosegay etc....⁴⁹

On 28th August 1663 there is a "Memorial by Simon Mancelli of money transactions between Capt. Roche, Fras. Corbetta and Sr. Jean fran. Finochelli relative to the lottery of the Royal Oak set up at Smithfield Fair...."⁵⁰

The Smithfield Fair, more properly known as the Bartholomew Fair because it took place in the precincts of the Priory Church of St. Bartholomew the Great, Smithfield, in the City of London, was held on or about

⁴⁵ Calendar (1860) 1660-1661 p. 494, January 1661.

⁴⁶ Calendar (1860) 1661-1662 p. 146, November 14th 1661.

⁴⁷ Calendar (1860) 1661-1662 p. 156, November 23rd 1661.

⁴⁸ Calendar (1860) 1661-1662 p. 157, November 23rd 1661.

⁴⁹ Calendar (1860) 1663-1664 p. 253, August 25th 1663.

⁵⁰ Calendar (1860) 1663-1664 p. 254, August 28th 1663.

the Feast of St. Bartholomew on 24th August. Originally the principal fair for the sale of cloth in England, it expanded to include various forms of entertainment including sideshows, prize-fighters, musicians, acrobats and lotteries.

On December 23rd Corbetta was granted yet another license for games called “The Royal Oak and Il Trionfo Imperiale”.

Grant to Fras. Corbett of license to set up lotteries of a new invention called the Royal Oak and Trionfo Imperiale⁵¹

On receipt of this license Corbetta wrote in a petition that

he travels to France for his health. But no sooner gone but this was likewise prohibited to his very great prejudice and almost loss of life in a strange country.⁵²

Presumably these lotteries were important sources of income for him aside from his musical activities.

Corbetta petitioned the King again in January (?) 1664,

Francis Corbett to the King. Was joined in a patent for the game of Royal Oak with Capt. Roche, who has separated from him & associated himself with Sir [Ant] Des Marces. Bgs the profits of the patent for six months, or some satisfaction therefor; also leave to sell his place as ‘valet de chambre’ to the queen as ill health obliges him to go abroad; and he wants money for his journey and medical treatment.⁵³

This seems to be the earliest reference to his travelling abroad, apparently due to ill health. It gives no inkling of what ailed him nor why it was necessary for him to go abroad for treatment.

Later in 1664 (?) Corbetta wrote to the King from Paris about the matter

Francesco Corbetto, Your Majesty’s most humble and faithful servant, says that after being ill en route, he has arrived in Paris, where Madame (the king’s sister, Henrietta Anne, wife of the Duke of Orléans) wishes to see him, but he has been unable to visit her as he has had to take to his bed because he is still unwell. He says that the good hope that Your Majesty promised him sustains him until such time as he can take advantage of the letter of exchange which it pleased Your Majesty to promise him. Because of the impediments which Sir Henry Benett has placed in the way of the game he does not want to have any profit from it. The supplicant believed that he would find some financial assistance in Paris whilst awaiting Your Majesty’s pleasure but says that he found only letters bearing bad news. He therefore humbly begs Your Majesty to be gracious enough not to allow him to be wronged in the favour which your Majesty has granted him and begs you to send him help in the form of a letter of exchange as quickly as possible as he hopes to come to the feet of Your Majesty and do his utmost to meet with the satisfaction of Your Majesty, to whom devotedly and deeply he bows.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Calandar (1860) 1663-1664 p. 361, December 2nd 1663.

⁵² Roberts (1991) Part 1. Source unclear.

⁵³ Calandar (1860) 1663-1664 p. 454, January (?) 1664.

⁵⁴ Mabbett (1986) p. 245. citing State Papers 29/109-9. Francesco Corbetto humillss.º et fedellss.º servitore di Vostra maestà, dice che doppo di essere restato su la strada amalato, e gionto a pariggi, et desiderando madama vederlo, non ha potuto essendo forzato dal malle de meterssi à letto, dice che la bona speranza che Vostra maestà li ha promesso in partire lo nutrisce, sino che

It seems that Corbetta was employed initially as “Groom of the Privy Chamber to the Queen” - Catherine of Braganza - whom Charles had married in May 1662. His obituary states that Charles II bestowed upon him the title of “Gentilhomme de la Reyne”⁵⁵ and from 1665 there is a ‘Warrant for an immediate livery for Francesco Corbetta, Groom of the Privy Chamber to the Queen [Doquet]’.⁵⁶

However, in May 1665 he petitioned for a place in the King’s household.

Petition of Francesco Corbetta, to the King. Having refused the proffers of several foreign princes in order to serve His Majesty, he wishes to exchange his place of Groom of the Privy Chamber to the Queen for that of Page of the Backstairs to the King, for the better convenience of showing his proper talent and to be admitted as a supernumary until a place is vacant; in the meantime, he will live on the pension provided him.⁵⁷

The Privy Chamber was the private apartment of a royal residence; grooms of the Privy Chamber waited on members of the royal family during their various leisure activities. Pages of the Backstairs were fairly junior servants who also waited on royalty in private. Both positions would presumably have allowed Corbetta ready access to the King and Queen - the obituary states that Charles gave him “une Clef de sa Chambre”.⁵⁸ His musical activities were probably on a private, informal level rather than as part of the musical establishment which performed in public.

There are references to him performing for various other dignitaries. In September/October 1664 he took part in a performance referred to by the French ambassador, the Comte de Comminges, in a letter to the Marquis de Lionne, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to the French Court in Paris.

The King of Great Britain with twelve of the principal Lords of his Court did me the honour of having supper with me the other Monday.....The meal was merry and the time after supper was employed in listening to music, the violins and the Sieur Francisque, the great guitar player Madame de Fienne was of the party which did its duty well.⁵⁹

‘La guitarre royale’ (1671) includes a sarabande on p. 21 subtitled ‘La Cominge’ which is dedicated to him.

In his memoirs of life at the Court of Charles II, Anthony Hamilton refers to Corbetta and a sarabande which he had composed. This was a hit amongst the numerous amateur guitarists at court, including

ne possa goderela gratia de la letera di Cambio che Vostra maestà li ha piaciuto di promettere, stando che per l’impedimento del S.^r Henri benet a fatto, et fa al gioco che non vole havere profito alcuno; credendo il suplicante di ritrovare in pariggi qualche agiuto di denaro in attendendo la gratia [di] Vostra maestà, dice di non havere trovato solo che letere di male nove; Cossi humilmente suplica Vostra maestà de gratia di non lasciarli far torto ne la gratia che Vostra maestà li ha concesso, come suplica d’inviarli il soccorso de la letera Cambio acciò presto come spera di venire a piedi di Vostra maestà, et a tutto suo potere incontrare nelle satisfationi di Vostra maestà a Cui divotto et proffondamente s’inchina. Abbreviated version in Calendar (1860) 1664-5 Part 1, p.139.

⁵⁵ Mercure (1681).

⁵⁶ Calendar (1860) 1665-1666, p.169. See also Ashbee (1986) Vol. 8 p.337.

⁵⁷ Calendar (1860) 1665-1666, p. 143 . May 1665. See also Ashbee (1986), vol. 8, p.337.

⁵⁸ Mercure (1681).

⁵⁹ Pepys1 (1828) Vol. 5, Appendix, p.464. Le Roi de la Grande Bretagne avec douze des principaux seigneurs de sa Cour me fit l’honneur de souper lundy céans ;Le repas fut gai, et l’après soupée employée à ouïr la musique, les violons et le Sieur Francisque, grand joueur de guitare. – Madame de Fienne étoit de la partie, qui fit bien son devoir. I am indebted to Chris Page for identifying the source of this reference.

Charles's younger brother, the Duke of York, later James II. Presumably this was one of the sarabandes included in 'La guitarre royale' (1671) although it is not clear which one.

There was a certain Italian at Court, famous for the guitar. He had a genius for music, and he was the only man who could make anything of the guitar; but his music was so graceful and tender that he would have made harmony with the most ungrateful of instruments. In truth, nothing was more difficult than to play the same way as he. The King's taste for his compositions had made this instrument so fashionable that everyone played it, well or ill..... The Duke of York played passably and the Count of Arran⁶⁰ as well as Francisque himself. This Francisque had composed a sarabande which charmed or enraptured the whole world; so that every guitarrist at court tried to play it and God only knows what universal strumming there was.⁶¹

He goes on to describe the amorous intrigues between various people at court. Hamilton was the son of Sir George Hamilton, younger son of James, Earl of Abercorn; his mother was sister to the 1st Duke of Ormond. He was born in Ireland but grew up in France during the Interregnum. His memoirs, which were published posthumously in 1713, draw extensively on the reminiscences of Philibert, Comte de Grammont, a French nobleman who spent some time at the Restoration Court in the 1670s.

Corbetta may have travelled abroad again in 1665 as there is a note in the Treasury Book stating that "being disirous to pass beyond the seas" he asks for arrears from 16th June 1663 to 1st Nov. 1665, board wages – at three and fourpence a day.⁶² On May 29th, 1667 Charles II wrote to his sister, Henriette-Anne, wife to the younger brother of Louis XIV, Philippe, Duc d'Orleans

I have heere sent you some lessons for the guitarr, which I hope will please you. The Comte de Gramont did carry over with him others, which maybe you have; and as Francisco makes any more that pleases me, I will send them to you.⁶³

Presumably these were pieces in manuscript, which Corbetta later published in 'La guitarre royale' (1671). During the 1660s Corbetta seems to have enjoyed the support of Madame D'Orleans during his visits to Paris and may have acted as an emissary between her and Charles on a regular basis. There is a record of a payment to him in the Secret Service Accounts dated 22nd March 1663 when the sum of £100 was set aside "To Mr. John Quinn for Seig^r Francisco".⁶⁴ The Secret Service accounts were used to bypass the Exchequer to record payments to private individuals and to spies and informers. It is not known whether Corbetta was actually involved in espionage or simply paid as a private individual. Madame died

⁶⁰ In 1656, Anne Hamilton, 3rd Duchess of Hamilton married William Douglas, 1st Earl of Selkirk. He changed his surname to "Hamilton", and on 20 September 1660 was created Duke of Hamilton, Marquis of Clydesdale, Earl of Arran, Lanark and Selkirk and Lord Aven,

⁶¹ Hamilton (1713) p. 26. Il y avait un certain Italien à la cour, fameux pour la guitare. Il avait du génie pour la musique; et c'est le seul qui de la guitare ait pu faire quelque chose; mais sa composition était si gracieuse et si tendre, qu'il aurait donné de l'harmonie au plus ingrat de tous les instruments. La verité est que rien n'était plus difficile que de jouer à sa manière. Le goût du roi pour ses compositions avait tellement mis cet instrument à la mode, que tout le monde en jouait bien ou mal;.....Le duc d'York en jouait passablement, et le compte [sic] d'Arran comme Francisco lui-même. Ce Francisque venait faire une sarabande qui charmait ou désolait tout le monde; car toute la guitarerie de la cour se mit à l'apprendre, et Dieu sait la raclerie universelle que c'était!

⁶² Roberts (1991) Part 1, p. 15. No source of reference given.

⁶³ Charles II (1996) p. 117.

⁶⁴ Dorchester, Dorset History Centre D/FSI box 267, Secret Service accounts maintained by Sir Stephen Fox, 15 October 1660-9 July 1674, f.3v. [Page (2017) p.68 & p.95 Note 16].

unexpectedly on 29th June 1670 and Corbetta dedicated to her the exquisite 'Tombeau' in C minor in 'La guitarre royale' (1671).⁶⁵

On 5th August, 1667 Samuel Pepys describes hearing Corbetta play in the private apartments of the Duke of York.

After done with the Duke of York and coming out through his dressing-room, I there espied seignor Francisco, tuning his guitar, and Monsieur de Puy with him, who did make him play to me; which he did so admirably that I was mightily troubled that all that pains should have been taken upon so bad an instrument.⁶⁶

Pepys was employed as an officer of the Navy Board in which capacity he attended on the Duke of York, Lord High Admiral, once a week on Monday mornings. August 5th was a Monday according to the Julian calendar in use in England until 1752.

In an account of the short visit that he made to London in February-March, 1668, the Italian writer and diplomat, Lorenzo Magalotti, includes Corbetta in his list of "Sonatori di viola" in royal employment in the section entitled *Artisti più famosi di Londra*.⁶⁷ Corbetta is referred to as "Francesco Corbetti, padovano, per la chitarra". Although Corbetta may have spent time in Padua, it is possible that this is an error for "Pavese". Other players listed include a fellow Italian, Cristofano Semproni; John Bannister (1630-1679, violinist, composer and at this time, leader of the King's Band; John Bolles, the viol player to whom Christopher Simpson dedicated the second edition of the "Division viol" in 1665; John Smith, in the King's Band (1660-1673); George Walsh; and Stewkin of Hamburg, possibly Theodor Steffkin – one of a family of musicians in the service of the Stuart kings. Presumably Corbetta would have been acquainted with all these and played along side them on occasion.

Visits to Paris and relationship with Antoine Carré, Sieur de la Grange

In the Fall of 1670 Corbetta was in Paris making arrangements for the printing of 'La guitarre royale' (1671). At the beginning of the Italian preface he says

I arrived in Paris last year in order to live there for some months and as I had begun this work in London, I brought the plates with me in order to finish it.⁶⁸

As the preface is undated it is uncertain exactly which year he arrived in Paris. It seems that he was involved in legal proceedings of some kind with the French guitarist, Antoine Carré, Sieur de la Grange, who also published his 'Livre de guitarre' in 1671. The nature of these proceedings is at present unknown but it may have had something to do with plagiarism as Carré included a piece from Corbetta's 1648 book in this book and in his later book, 'Livre de pieces de guitarre et de musique' printed between 1677-1687, he included three pieces from 'La guitarre royale' (1671). Corbetta's privilege to publish 'La guitarre royale' is dated 21 September 1670 which suggests his book was ready for printing by that date. According to the "Registres de privilèges" Corbetta registered his privilege on 20th December 1670 after Carré had obtained some kind of judgement in his favour at the Chatelet (the principal court of common law jurisdiction in France at the time) on 6th November. The entry is as follows

⁶⁵ La guitarre royale (1671) p. 10.

⁶⁶ Pepys2 (1946) Entry for 5th August, 1667.

⁶⁷ Magalotti (1972) p.151.

⁶⁸ La guitarre royale (1671) p. 3. In congiuntura desser uenuto l'anno passata a Parigi per traiermi alcuni pochi mesi et hauiendo cominciato questo libro in Londra ne portai meco gl'intagli per qui finirlo.

20th December, 1670 Monsieur Corbetta has presented to us a privilege obtained by him from His Majesty for many pieces to play on the guitar etc. which Monsieur Bonneuil must enjoy following the sentence obtained at the Chatelet and dated Wednesday 6th November 1670 for the benefit of [or on behalf of] Antoine Carré sieur de La Grange, and this for a period of five years, dated the 21st September.⁶⁹

Carré and Corbetta were clearly acquainted. Bonneüil was the printer to whom Corbetta ceded his rights to publish 'La guitarre royale'. The book was not finally printed until 1st October 1671 but delays of this kind were not unusual. This may have been due to technical problems with printing rather than from any delay on Corbetta's part. In France engraving was at first an alternative to typography which was controlled by the Ballard patent. Most of the engraved music printed at that time is instrumental and Corbetta's book is one of the earliest if not the earliest to have been printed by Bonneüil.

'La guitarre royale' (1671) is one of the most interesting and challenging collections of seventeenth century guitar music. Corbetta himself clearly regarded it as his masterpiece and it includes his finest music. It probably circulated quite widely – the English composer, William Boyce owned a copy of it which was sold at auction after his death in 1779.⁷⁰

In March 1673 Charles II signed the Test Act requiring every office holder at Court, including all household staff, amongst them many musicians, to take Communion in the Church of England. This resulted in an exodus of catholic musicians and Corbetta may have been one of them. In any event, it seems that he was already in Paris in February of that year. A rhymed newsletter by Charles Robinet in the style of Jean Loret describes a concert which took place at the Chateau de Saint-Germain-en-Laye on February 18th in the presence of the King, Queen, Monsieur (the king's younger brother) and 'Seigneurs et Dames de la cour' in which he took part.

***Icelle [sic] eût aussi, trois Concerts,
Qui valoyent mieux que trois Desserts
Mais le meilleur, et des plus rares,
Fut, cher lecteur, de deux Guitares,
Encor que ce soit l'Instrument
Le plus ingrat, et moins charmant,
Mais j'ose dire sans nul risque
Que lorsque le fameux Francisque,
Ce cher Arion Milanois,
Le touche avec ses maigres doigts,
Il n'est Luth, Théorbe, ni Lyre,
Qui sur l'Oreille est plus d'Empire.
La petite Muse Plantier,
Dont mon historique Psautier
A si souvent dit les Merveilles,
Qui sont, bonne foy, sans pareilles
Dedans le siècle d'aujourd'hui,***

⁶⁹ Brenet (1906) p. 414 quoting from F-Pn Ms. Fr. 21945, the French equivalent of the Stationers' Registers. 20 décembre 1670. Le sieur Corbetta nous a présenté un privilege par luy obtenu de S. M. pour plusieurs pieces à jouer sur la guitarre, etc., duquel le Sr Bonneuil doit jouir suivant la sentence obtenue au Chatelet et dattée du mercredi VIe novembre 1670 au profit de Antoine Carré sieur de La Grange, et ce pour le temps de cinq années, et datté du 21 septembre.

⁷⁰ Johnstone (2010).

*Jouait, en partie, avec Luy,
Et ravit, la chose est certaine,
Tant le Monarque, que la Reyne,
Monsieur, et pour le trancher cour,
Seigneurs et Dames de la Cour.*⁷¹

Robinet notes that Corbetta performed a number of duets with 'La petite Muse Plantier', Marie-Anne Plantier, a noble amateur guitarist.⁷² What they played is not specified, but the performance could have included the duets from the 'La guitarre royalle' (1674). This was the first French publication to include compositions for two guitars.

The first printed news sheets began to appear in France in 1631. They were the work of Jean Loret (1660-1665) and took the form of weekly letters in rhyme addressed to Mademoiselle de Longueville, Marie d'Orleans (1625-1707), daughter of Henri II d'Orleans. Charles Robinet succeeded him, making his debut as a writer on 25th May 1665. From then on, he wrote each week to Madame (d'Orleans), sister-in-law of Louis XIV. After her death in June 1670, he addressed his letters to the 'ombre de Madame' – the shade of Madame, then to her husband, Monsieur, and finally from 1674 to Monsieur & Madame after Monsieur's marriage to the Princess Palatine (Liselotte). He died 25th April 1698 when more than 80 years old.

Corbetta probably remained in Paris until the beginning of 1674. The privilege of his final surviving book, also titled 'La guitarre royale', is dated 21st December 1673. As before he ceded his privilege to the printer Bonneüil and the book was finally printed on the 12th January 1674. It is dedicated to Louis XIV and features music in a style which apparently pleased him most.

Calisto

Corbetta's absence from court was shortlived as later in 1674 he was involved in rehearsals for the English masque 'Calisto' by John Crowne. These took place regularly three times a week beginning in November 1674. Corbetta is cited amongst the four guitarists hired for the occasion listed in the records of the Lord Chamberlain now preserved in the Record Office.

Musicians in the Mask Gittars. 4

Mr. Frasico [sic] Corbett,
Mr. Cutom

Mr. Deloney
Mr. Delloney⁷³

⁷¹ Brossard (1970) p.136-7. 1673, 18 février (la cour à Saint Germain-en-Laye). Here there were also three concerts/Which were worth more than three desserts/But the best and the rarest/Dear reader, was of two guitars./Although the instrument maybe/The most thankless and least charming,/I dare say without any risk/That when the famous Francisque,/That dear Milanese Arion/Plays it with his slender fingers/The lute, the theorbo or the harp/Do not please the ear more powerfully./The little muse Plantier/Of whom my historic Psalter [i.e. his collection of letters]/Has so often spoken wonders,/Which are, in good faith, without equal/Within the century of today/Played in consort with him./And ravished, the matter is certain,The King, the Queen,/Monsieur, and to cut the matter short,/The Lords and Ladies of the Court.

⁷² Marie-Anne Plantier was daughter of Sieur Plantier, Avocat in Parlement, and Doctor Agrégé in the Université de Valence, and niece of Mill^e Béranger.

⁷³ Ashbee (1986) Vol. 1 p. 146. Source - Lord Chamberlain. Vol. 745, pp. 547, 548

The exact dates of performances are unclear. John Evelyn mentions attending performances on 15th and 22nd December but these may have been of the spoken part of the play only without the participation of the musicians.⁷⁴ The masque was finally performed on Shrove Monday and Tuesday, 15th and 16th February 1675 in the Hall Theatre, which had been specially renovated for the occasion.⁷⁵ There may have been further performances in April, May or June. Calisto is not really a masque, but a play with a musical introduction and *intermedii* or interludes. Because of a literary feud between the poet laureate, John Dryden, and the Earl of Rochester,⁷⁶ Dryden was passed over and the commission given to John Crowne. The roles in the play itself were taken by amateurs, including the daughters of the Duke of York, Princess Mary and Princess Anne; other members of the court also took part as dancers and attendants. The *intermedii* featured professional singers from the Chapel Royal, the King's Private Musick and the public stage.

Dramatis personae

Calisto, a chaste and favourite Nymph of Diana, beloved of Jupiter	Lady Mary (aged 13)
Nyphe, a chaste young Nymph, friend to Calisto	Lady Anne (aged 10)
Jupiter	Lady Henrietta Wentworth ⁷⁷
Juno	Lady Anne Fitzroy, Countess of Sussex (aged 14) ⁷⁸
Diana	Margaret Blagg
Psecas	Lady Mary Mordaunt
Mercury	Sarah Jennings (Later Duchess of Marlborough) ⁷⁹

In the myth on which the play is based Jupiter falls in love with Calisto, a nymph of Diana. He rapes her and then turns her into a bear. Calisto later escapes death at the hand of her son by being transformed into a star. Crowne altered the story extensively to make it suitable for the young princesses. Jupiter is unsuccessful in his attempts on Calisto's virtue, comes to her rescue when she is accused of misconduct by Juno and finally offers her and her sister sovereignty of a star.

The play is very long; there are 5 acts, with singing and dancing only in the prologue, epilogue and *intermedii*. The *intermedii* comprised pastoral scenes and dances which have no connection with the play. The Prologue – as was customary – pays homage to King Charles and his consort Catherine of Braganza. Thames, attended by Peace, Plenty, Europe, Asia, Africa and America, is alarmed by the distress of Europe's nymphs, but is reassured by the Genius of England who sends two heroes to their aid. All involved are about to offer homage to Fame, but seeing the King and Queen pay homage to them instead. Several sarabands with castanets were danced by the two

⁷⁴ Evelyn (1955) Vol IV p.49-51.

⁷⁵ Boswell (1932) p.200-203.

⁷⁶ John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester (1648-1680) was a poet noted for his dissolute life style and often obscene verse.

⁷⁷ She later became mistress to James, Duke of Monmouth, Charles II's eldest illegitimate child, who also took part.

⁷⁸ Illegitimate daughter of Charles II and Lady Castelmaine – married to the Earl of Sussex.

⁷⁹ Duchess of Marlborough, friend and confidante of Princess, later Queen, Anne.

princesses and other ladies in the Prologue.⁸⁰ The Duke of Monmouth danced a minuet with several other gentlemen, and also appeared as a hero “crown’d with a ‘Mural Crown’”.⁸¹

The music

The music was composed by Nicholas Staggins. He was sworn in as Master of the King’s Music and leader of the Band of Violins on 29th January, 1674/5 – two weeks before the performance took place - but may have been acting in that capacity for several months previously. The instrumental music probably consisted of dances and accompaniments for the songs although there may have been “symphonies” during the prologue and between the acts. The vocal music was performed by professional singers.

What little survives of the music is found in the manuscript GB-LblMs. Add. 19759. This is a collection of 17th century songs including items by Purcell, Blow, Pelham Humphreys, Locke and others mostly in the form of a single treble clef vocal line.

At the beginning of the manuscript there is a note

**Charles Campelman his book
June y^e 9 1681
God give him grace 1682**

The pieces from ‘Calisto’ are found on folios 18 and 18^v. There is a note ‘Calisto/Catch’ in pencil above first song.

f.18

Augusta is inclined to fears	Prologue
Poor Corydon, thy flame remove	First Intermedio
Kind lovers, love on	First Intermedio
Alas poor Shepherd	Second Intermedio

f.18v

No longer complaine	Third Intermedio
Joy Shepherds joy	Fourth Intermedio
Since all our grief	Fourth Intermedio

At the end ‘Mr. Stagings’.

Another manuscript, GB-Ob Ms Mus. Sch. F. 572, a collection of songs, instrumental music and Restoration verse includes an arrangement for guitar of the first piece with the title Augusto; this was performed by the singer Mary Davis in the role of *Thames* during the Prologue.

⁸⁰ Holman (1999) p. 15.

⁸¹ Mural crown – crown given to Roman soldiers who first scaled a wall in a seige.

The costumes

Some of the players were visible to the audience, probably in a space set at the back of the stage. The rest may have been concealed behind the scenes where there was a “floor with severall degrees for y^e Musicke”. Lavish costumes of ‘taffety’ and ‘avinnion’ - thin silk, like sarcenet, possibly made in Avignon - were provided for twenty of the violinists, the four guitarists, two of the recorders players, four trumpeters and a drummer. The princely sum of £18. 2s. 0d was spent on costumes for the guitarists -

“Kittars” (4)

ffor making a taffety gowne Laced with gawes downe before round the sleeves and neck and bottome with all small ffurniture	10. 0
making gilt leather cap with feathers	4. 0
gilt leather	4. 0
for making 3 more	2. 14. 0
18 ells white taffeta	9. 18. 0
16 yds. broad gold gauze	1. 12. 0
2 yds. broad gold gauze	4. 0
Gytar Master 14 falls (of feathers of severall collours)	2. 16. 0

	18. 2. 0

Exactly what the guitarists played is unclear; in particular it is not known whether they formed part of the regular continuo group or whether they were a separate act accompanying the more popular dance numbers.

Encounter with Aulus Apronius

In December 1676 Corbetta petitioned for leave of absence from his post to travel to France and further afield. The pass, which is dated 13th December 1676, reads

Pass for Francesco Corbetti, one of the Italian musicians of the King’s Bedchamber, who is going to France and other foreign parts.⁸²

It must have been during this period of absence from the English Court that the incident described by Adam Ebert aka Aulus Apronius in his ‘Reise-Beschreibung’ took place.

There are two different editions of the book, printed in 1723 and 1724. The earlier edition does not include the fuller account of Corbetta’s visit to Turin with the reference to his ‘Memoirs’.

The town of Turin has a cathedral of St. John. At Christmas when the young Duke Victor Amadeus II was on the throne, he came out and attended a celebratory supper with his mother and aunt at which music for theorbos, lutes, angeliques and guitars could be heard. But as such music is not very loud and unsuited to open spaces such as churches, it was performed before a small private assembly and the musical works adapted to suit the needs of the voices. The Pilgrim [Peregrinant - Ebert refers to himself as a pilgrim] was informed that the director was an Italian named Bertelli.

⁸²Calendar (1860) 1676 p.451 (which cites Home Office, Warrant Book I, p.331).

Recently the world-famous guitarist, Corbetta, who taught all the Potentates of Europe, came here [to Turin] from England. But because he had the misfortune to break a fingernail (and with old folk these grow again very slowly) it was impossible for him to present himself at the festival with his consort, however much he wanted to. Every foreign musician who performed at court in Turin was given 500 Thlr. and Madame Royale wished to show her generosity by not withholding anything [from Signor Corbetta]. (1723 version ends here).

Corbetta complained bitterly that he had come from England with great difficulty, and because he had invited people from Italy to come there [to Turin] to play in consort on his guarantee, he had to pay them afterwards out of his own pocket. He had brought with him a daughter whose acquaintance we made, in order to persuade her to search amongst her Father's possessions for his personal Memoires about the courts he had visited. At a time when her father was bedridden, the Pilgrim gave to the aforementioned Signore a Louis d'Or [a gold coin] to secretly bring the materials to his home; when she reclaimed them, he gave her another Pistolette [a smaller coin] for her own use. After his request was successful the 'Liber Relationes ex parnasso di variis Europae eventibus' enjoyed no small part of it.⁸³

Victor Amadeus was born on the 14th May, 1666. In June 1675 at the age of nine he succeeded his father as Duke of Savoy. His mother, Marie Jeanne of Savoy, a distant cousin of Louis XIV and the second wife of Charles Emmanuel II of Savoy, known as "Madame Royale", acted as Regent during his minority. Corbetta's obituary refers to her patronage and more generally to the esteem in which he was held by the nobility; he was clearly well known in Europe at the time.

People of the first rank always held him in the same esteem and above all he received many tender tokens of kindness from Her Royal Highness, Madame in his last days.⁸⁴

In 1684 Victor Amadeus married Anne-Marie, the elder daughter of Madame d'Orleans, Henriette-Anne, the sister of the English king Charles II.

⁸³ Ebert (1724) p10-12. (1723) p.251 Der Stadt *Turin* hat eine *Cathedral*-Kirche zu St-Johannis also umb Wennachten der junge Herzog *Victor Amadeus II.* aus einem Thron nebst seiner Frau Mutter und Muhme hervor trat und zum Heil. Abendmahl gieng; da denn die trefflichshe *Musique* von *Thiorben*, Lauten, *Angeliquen* und *Guiternen* sich hören liesse. Solche sanffte *Musique* aber schickte sich gar nicht in sehr grossen und offnen Plätzen, als Kirchen und dergleiche, sondern sie ist nur vor solitaire, privat assemble, und de *Operen*, darinn der *Vocal Musique* praevaliren muss. Der *Director* war ein Italianer *Bertelli* genandt; so auch *Peregrinanten* unterrichtet. Es war zwar kurz zuvor der Weltberühmte *Guitariste*, *Corbetto*, so alle Potentaten in Europa unterrichtet, aus England alhier angekommen, weil er aber das *Malheur*, dass ihm der Nagel am Finger abgebrochen, und gar langsam ben alten Leuten wieder zu wachsen pfeget, so war ihm ohnmöglich mit seiner *Musique* sich ben dem Fest auffzuführen, wie sehr er es auch verlangte. Es ward einem jedem fremden *Musico*, so in *Turin* am Hoff sich hören liess 500. Thlr. gegeben; und wolte *Madame Royale* sich darinn absonderlich zu ihren Zeiten sehen lassen, und dem [*Signor Corbetto* isso] nichts abbrechen. (1723 edition ends here). *Corbetto* klagte sehr, dass er mit grossen Schaden aus England gekommen sintemahl er die Leute aus Italien der *Musique* wegen auff seine *Garantie* dahin kommen lassen, und dieselbe nochmahls aus seinen Beutel auszahlen müssen. Er hatte eine Tochter mitgebracht mit welcher man sich darumb bekandt gemacht, weil ben den Vater besondere *Memoiren* vor den Höffen also er sich auffgehalten zu spühren als der Vater einsmahl Bettlägerig, gab *Peregrinant* gedachter *Signore* ein *Lovisdor* di Sachen unter de Hand nach Hause zu friegen wann sie wieder gebracht noch eine *Pistolette* deswegen darvor derselben geniessen zu lassen. Nachdem solches nach Wunsch reusfirt, so haben die *L. Relationes ex Parnasso di variis Europae eventibus* nicht geringen Antheil daraus sich zu erfreuen gehabt.

⁸⁴ Mercure 1681. Les Personnes du premier rang luy ont toujours conservé la mesme estime, & sur tout il a reçue dans ses derniers jours plusieurs marques sensibles des bontez de son Altesse Royale Madame.

The passage affords a few interesting snippets of information. Most importantly from a musical point of view, it seems that Corbetta played with his nails; this may have been common practice on the baroque guitar. The well-known portrait of Domenico Pellegrini in his 'Armoniosi concerti sopra la chitarra spagnuola' shows him with very long right-hand nails. On the other hand, John Playford in 'Musick's delight on the cithren' seems to imply that nails should be kept short.

***Rest only your little finger on the belly of your cithren and so with your thumb and first finger and sometimes the second strike your strings, as is used on the gittar... and be sure you keep your nails short on the right hand.*⁸⁵**

In spite of the fact that Corbetta was unable to perform with his consort, it seems that he was actually paid, something has not been made clear previously. The 1724 edition is also the only reference to his having a daughter; no further information about her has so far come to light.

Ebert was born in Frankfurt Oder in 1656, studied law at the University there and died in March 1735. He seems to have been a somewhat eccentric and contraversial individual. 'Reise-Beschreibung', which was published under the pseudonym "Aulus Apronius", is an account of his travels throughout Europe in the 1670s.

One can only speculate as to why the anecdote about the loan of Corbetta's "Memoirs" is not included in the earlier edition. It has been suggested that at least some of the book actually reproduces Corbetta's own memoirs which Ebert borrowed from the daughter.⁸⁶ This is based on a misunderstanding. The 'Liber Relationes ex parnasso di variis Europae eventibus' dated 1683 mentioned at the end of the extract quoted above is a different work from 'Reise-Beschreibung'. If Ebert did pirate any part of Corbetta's memoirs it would have been in this book rather than 'Reise-Beschreibung'. This is an alternative title for the work 'Historia Arcana Europae' where there is a brief mention of Corbetta in the following hexameter verse:

***Fidibus illustris ille Corbetto Italus
Voce Mārgarithā Salicōla virgō Boniensis
Venetis tam famosa theatris vicere musas.*⁸⁷**

Margarita Salicola (fl. 1682 – 1706) was a famous opera singer of her time. She came from a family of musicians at the court of Ferdinando Carlo Gonzaga, duke of Mantua and performed regularly at the San Giovanni Crisostomo Theatre in Venice in the 1680s. Ferdinando Carlo was the only child of Charles II, Duke of Mantua who had employed Corbetta in the early 1650s; he succeeded his father to the Dukedom in 1665. It is possible that Corbetta was acquainted with Margarita or at least with members of her family. There are no other references to him by name in Ebert's work. Ebert has been accused of plagiarism and it has been suggested that he could not have visited all the places mentioned in 'Reise-Beschreibung'. However, it is known that he visited

⁸⁵ Playford (1660).

⁸⁶ The source of this misunderstanding seems to be a handwritten note on the flyleaf of the British Library's copy of 'Anecdota sive historia arcana Europae' which reads 'In the Bibliotheca Riuchiana it is stated that 'Reise-Beschreibung' was not composed by Ebert'. "Bibliotheca Riuchiana" refers to the Bibliotheca Richiana - books, manuscripts and other antiquarian materials gathered by the early 19th century Oriental linguist, Claudius James Rich. I am indebted to Chris Page for this information.

⁸⁷ Ebert (1715) p.3. With the strings of his guitar that illustrious Italian, Corbetto, By her voice Margharitha Salicola, the most famous maid of Bologna, surpassed (defeated) the muses in the Venetian theatres.

England himself in 1678, buying books, and making contact with the Royal Society, and his account of his visit in 'Reise-Beschreibung' is accurate and convincing.

Final years in England

In 1677 Corbetta was employed as guitar teacher to Lady (later Queen) Anne, the younger daughter of James II. The 'Establishment Book for the Household of James, Duke of York' from Christmas 1677 lists payments to the following musicians

Guytarr Master	Mr. Francisco Corbet	£100
Singing Master	Monsieur Robert	£50
Music Master	Mr. John Bannister	£70
Musitian	Mr. Thomas Greeting	£31. 04.00⁸⁸

James had converted to Roman catholicism in 1672 which may explain why Corbetta was attached to his household rather than that of the King towards the end of his time in England.

In the same year Corbetta seems to have published another guitar book now missing. The 'Term Catalogue for the Michaelmas Term', 1677 includes the following entry –

EASIE Lessons on the Guittar for young Practitioners; single, and some of two Parts. By Seignior Francisco. Printed for Jo. Carr in the Middle Temple lane. Price 3s 3d.⁸⁹

The Term Catalogue was a trade journal edited by John Starkey and Robert Clavell which claimed to be a "catalogue of books printed and published in London". It was issued three times a year for the Hilary⁹⁰, Easter and Michaelmas terms. John Carr (fl. 1672-95) was a bookseller, music printer and instrument seller who had a shop at Middle Temple Gate near that of John Playford the Elder. The book is also included in a list of 'MUSICK Books sold by John Carr at the Middle Temple Gate' included in Henry Playford's 'The Theater of Music. The Second Book', printed in 1685.⁹¹

Corbetta may also have been a witness at a marriage which took place in the Queen's Chapel at Somerset House on 19th May 1678. The entry reads as follows

No. 289 May the 19th 1678. In her Ma^{ties} Chappell Royall att Somersett-house, were joined in lawful Wedlock Gerom (Jerome) Servarie and Anne Chapman of St. Martin's in the ffields in the presence of Howll & ffoster, Peter Novell, x ffracisque is marque, Will. Yarde, by me fr: James a St Bonaventure.⁹²

The comment "x ffracisque is marque" implies that he was unable to sign his name which seems unlikely unless he was by that time – at the age of about 63 - disabled in some way. His eyesight

⁸⁸ British Lib. Add. Ms.18958 – f.8v – Establishment Book for the Household of James, Duke of York from Christmas 1677 Ashbee (1986) vol.2, p. 121.

⁸⁹ Arber (1903) Vol. 1, p.291.

⁹⁰ The second term (January-March) of the academic year at Oxford University so called because it begins on the first Sunday after the feast of St. Hilary of Tours celebrated on 14th January.

⁹¹ Playford (1685).

⁹² Weale (1941) p. 28, No. 289

might have been failing or perhaps he had had a slight stroke. James a St Bonaventure officiated at marriages between Sept. 29, 1673-May 30, 1678 and Will Yarde appears as a witness several times. Somerset House, the residence of Charles II's Portuguese queen, Catherine of Braganza, was the centre of Catholic life in England at the time. During this same period a fine portrait of Corbetta was made by the French artist and engraver, Henri Gaspar.⁹³ Corbetta's obituary states that Charles II gave him "his portrait [that of Charles himself rather than Corbetta] studded with diamonds, and a considerable pension".⁹⁴

Corbetta returned to Paris towards the end of his life where he died some time before May 1681 when his obituary appeared in 'Mercure galant'. He seems to have regretted not spending more time in the French capital.

Regret at leaving France having come to him too late, he made two or three journeys to Paris, where he was at pains to print several books of his works, as he had done previously in Flanders, Italy, and elsewhere. He finally returned to France, to signify by his death the regret he felt at not having spent all his life there.⁹⁵

It is noteworthy that 'Mercure galant' suggests that Corbetta had works printed elsewhere as it is possible that he had had a book printed in Spain rather earlier. A fitting epitaph by Remy Médard, is reproduced at the end of the obituary.

Epitaphe de Francisque Corbet

***Cy gist l'Amphion de nos jours,
Francisque, cet Homme si rare,
Qui fit parler à sa Guitarre
Le vray langage des Amours.***

***Il gagna par son harmonie
Les coeurs des Princes, & des Reys.
Et plusieurs ont crû qu'un Genie
Prenoit le soin de coneuire ses doights.***

***Passant, si tu n'as pas entendu ces merveilles,
Apprens qu'il ne devoit jamais finir son Sort
Et qu'il auroit charmé la Mort;
Mais, hélas! Par malheur, elle n'a point d'oreilles.***⁹⁶

⁹³ A copy of the print is in the British Museum, no. 1902-10-11-2227.

⁹⁴ Mercure (1681) ... son Portrait enrichy de Diamans, & une Pension considerable.

⁹⁵ Mercure (1681). Le regret d'avoir quitté la France luy estant venu trop tard, il fit deux ou trois voyages à Paris; dans lesquels il eut soin de faire imprimer quelques Livres de sa Composition, comme il avoit déjà fait en Flandre, en Italie, & ailleurs. Il est enfin revenu en France, marquer par sa mort la douleur qu'il avoit de ne luy avoir pas donné toute sa vie.

⁹⁶ Mercure (1681). Here lies the Amphion of our times, Francisque, so rare a man, who made his guitar to speak the very language of love. / He won with his harmony the hearts of Princes and of Kings, and many believed that a Genie took care to guide his fingers. / Passer-by, if you have not heard these marvels, know that he should never have met his fate, and that he would have charmed Death herself. But alas! Unfortunately she hath not ears.

Rémy Médard also refers to Corbetta in a less complimentary fashion in the introduction to his own guitar book – ‘Pieces de guitarre’ printed in 1676

I have tried to emulate the style of the celebrated Francisque Corbet which he explained to me over several months with this difference – I found for my pieces a simplicity which he could not take the trouble to give to his.⁹⁷

Robert de Visée, who may also have known Corbetta personally, composed a moving ‘Tombeau’ for him, included in his first guitar book, ‘Livre de guittarre’, printed by Bonneüil in 1682.

Corbetta was clearly well known enough in France to be mentioned twice by Le Gallois in his letter to Mademoiselle de Regnault de Solier, published in 1680.

Each instrument had, and has still today, Masters of this kind We see Messieurs le Moine, Pinel, de Visé, Hurel, and a few others for the theorbo, the guitar with francisque corbette, Mr. de Valroy, and Mr. de Visé.⁹⁸

It is certain that some of them have had universal recognition, which seems to place them in just possession of the crown; like a Gautier for the lut, a Chambonnier for the harpsichord, a Lambert for the song, a Francisque Corbette for the guitar; and so on.⁹⁹

Sadly, the exact date of Corbetta’s death and his place of burial are unknown.

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⁹⁷ No page number. Je pretens avoir entierment suivi la maniere du fameux francisque Corbet, qu’il ma communiqué pendant quelques mois avec cette difference que J’ay trouvé pour mes pieces une facilité qu’il ne s’est pas donné la peine de chercher.

⁹⁸ Le Gallois (1680) Chaque instrument a eu, & a encore aujourd’huy des Maîtres de cette nature.... On voit Messieurs le Moine, Pinel, de Visé, Hurel, & quelques autres encore pour le teorbe, la Guittare à francisque corbette, Mr. de Valroy, & Mr. de Visé. Le Gallois (1680) p.62-3.

⁹⁹ Ibid p.64-5. Il est certain que quelques-uns d’eux ont eu une approbation universelle, qui semble les mettre dans une juste possession de la couronne; comme un Gautier pour le lut, un Chambonnier por le clavecin, un Lambert pour le chant, un Francisque Corbette pour la guitarre; y ainsi du reste.

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